

# **ALABAMA EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION COMMISSION**

## **MINUTES**

November 18, 2025

10:00 a.m.

*Alabama Public Television, Birmingham Conference Room  
2112 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue S., Suite 400, Birmingham, Alabama 35205*

### **PRIOR NOTICE**

Sufficient Prior Notice was given as required by the Alabama Open Meetings Act, the FCC, the CPB, and the policies of the AETC, as reported by APT Executive Director, Wayne Reid.

### **ROLL CALL (VERBAL)**

A verbal roll call was conducted by Mrs. Bebe Williams, Vice Chairwoman.

### **AETC COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

Mr. Ferris Stephens, Chairman

Mrs. Bebe Williams, Vice Chairwoman

Mrs. Tijuanna Adetunji (*virtual; joined late due to technical issues*)

Mr. Les Barnett (*virtual*)

Mr. Pete Conroy

Mr. Logan Glass

Mr. William A. Green, Jr. (*virtual*)

The Alabama Educational Television Commission consists of seven members. No members were absent, a quorum was present, and official business could be conducted.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.m. by Chairman Ferris Stephens. Chairman Stephens welcomed new board member, Logan Glass, representing the 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Alabama. Glass was appointed by the Governor on November 14, 2025.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Chairman Ferris Stephens opened the special meeting stating it was called to obtain additional financial and other information relating to the money problems discussed at the previous October 28, 2025 quarterly meeting. This was in response to the shortfall in APT's budget due to the recent reduction of approximately \$2.8 million in federal funding. This federal funding ceased from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) because Congress passed the Rescissions Act of 2025, which among other things, rescinded funds for the CPB. This in turn ceased federal funding to public television stations and networks, which normally had expected funding from the CPB. The APT dues to be paid for membership with the Public

Broadcasting Service (PBS) for the current year, beginning July 1, 2025 totaled approximately \$2.2 million. Chairman Stephens and the Commission had requested that Executive Director Wayne Reid provide particularized information for the special meeting to address options previously discussed which included: (1) discontinuing PBS membership and obtaining or producing alternative programming; (2) seeking more flexibility with choices and pricing by way of a menu or an a la carte programming arrangement with PBS; or (3) maintaining the current PBS relationship and seeking to raise funds to address the CPB shortfall as an alternative to laying off additional employees. APT recently laid off eleven employees because of the lack of CPB funding. The Executive Director at the previous meeting was asked if he could provide this information for the Commission for a November 18, 2025 special meeting, before PBS's dues invoice came due on November 30, 2025; Executive Director Reid indicated he could report to the Commission those findings on that date.

Chairman Stephens then requested that Executive Director Wayne Reid provide his report. Director Reid presented his financial analysis on each of the options previously discussed.

Director Reid stated his findings were from research and outreach to peer-state public broadcasting executives as well as with discussions with PBS. He reported that PBS would not make an a la carte programming option available for the current year and was unlikely to do so in the next fiscal year. He stated that PBS leadership indicated to him that a la carte programming would negatively impact national programming quality and sustainability. Also, he stated he found that most state networks surveyed indicated no present plans to change their PBS relationship, although some noted that future decisions in that regard may depend on the dues levels.

Mr. Reid reported that, at the Commissioners' request, he asked the Attorney General's Office if APT could be released from the payment provisions of its present contract with PBS because federal funds were no longer available. He stated that the contract review section of the Attorney General's Office advised that APT cannot terminate the current PBS contract on that basis, at least prior to June 30, 2026, when the contract ended; that the contract required a 180-day notice. This effectively obligated the Commission through near the end of the current contract term.

Mr. Reid also noted that certain state contracts, including education-related programming and training modules, rely on PBS content and would require replacement if PBS affiliation were ended.

Director Reid outlined the scope of services currently provided through PBS, including educational content, digital platforms, streaming infrastructure,

membership services, PBS Passport, national distribution through streaming providers, music licensing, and technical and digital support. He explained that replacing these services independently would involve significant one-time and ongoing costs, including increased staffing costs, digital infrastructure, programming acquisition, and music licensing fees.

He stated that replacement cost estimates were reviewed, which included approximately \$2.5 million annually for alternative programming alone, nearly \$1 million annually in music licensing fees, and over \$1 million digital transition costs that included additional staffing expenses. Director Reid stated that the total estimated ongoing annual cost to replace PBS services would exceed the current PBS dues, without accounting for expected membership revenue losses.

Director Reid explained that because APT operates under two budgets: the Education Television Commission budget, which is fully state-funded and secure for the current fiscal year, and the Foundation Authority budget, which relies on memberships, underwriting, grants, and CPB funds. The Recission Act of 2025 directly affected the Foundation Authority budget. Congress' rescission of CPB funding reduced the Foundation budget by approximately \$2.8 million, resulting in a projected \$1.4 million shortfall after expense reductions, including staff layoffs.

He reported that recent fundraising efforts have shown improvement, with increased membership support following public awareness of the funding cuts. However, he cautioned that discontinuing PBS affiliation could result in significant membership losses based on at least one other station's past experience. He stated that a similar result here could potentially create a substantially larger long-term deficit.

Director Reid made known that PBS would be making decisions soon whether to allow for a la carte choices to its members, as well as whether it would change the amount of its dues to public television members for its contract year beginning July 1, 2026.

Commissioner Bebe Williams and Chairman Ferris Stephens asked clarifying questions regarding PBS dues, funding sources, contractual obligations, and potential impacts on membership and programming. Discussion among the Commission members involved the issue of honoring the present contractual commitment, and maintaining public trust regarding expectation of present programming. Also discussed was whether there was a possibility of actions which could possibly further destabilize finances. Sought to be avoided was limiting new local productions, or reducing the capacity to purchase or create suitable educational programming for youth in our State.

Commissioner Bebe Williams moved that APT pay its PBS bill and honor the existing PBS contract through the current term ending in June. Commissioner Pete Conroy seconded the motion.

**Motion:** By Commissioner Bebe Williams that APT make the payment on its current November invoice for its PBS bill, and to honor the existing PBS contract through the current term ending in June.

**Seconded:** By Commissioner Pete Conroy

**Discussion:** Following discussion and clarification of payment timing and funding sources, the motion was approved by roll call vote.

**The Motion Passed**

Barnett – passed on the vote

Adetunji – absent (*was not logged in at the time of the vote*)

Conroy – yes

Glass – yes

Williams – yes

Stephens – yes

Green – yes

After the vote, Commissioner Pete Conroy moved that the Governor’s November 17, 2025 letter be entered as part of the official record of the Commission [attached and made a part of the minutes of the November 18, 2025561310 meeting]. He further moved that the Commission direct that the Executive Director establish an advisory committee which purpose is to fulfill the wishes the Governor as she proposed in her letter; and that the Executive Director include input from sources such as broadcasters, legislators, those with legal financial expertise and members of the public, and that the Executive Director submit the suggestions of that committee at its next meeting to help plan for the future. Also, that any such suggestions would not move forward until the Commission approved them.

Commissioner Les Barnett requested clarification regarding the scope and objectives of the proposed committee, expressing concern about ensuring that any studies or analysis undertaken would have a clear purpose and defined outcomes. He asked whether the proposed committee’s charge was limited to fulfilling the guidance outlined in the Governor’s letter or whether it would also explore broader strategic options.

Commissioner Bebe Williams spoke in support of the motion, stating first that she thought it was important to honor the existing obligations with PBS. She also stated that PBS can be used as a base for programming, but that the suggestions for the Commission could include educational programming that teaches character. She stated that very good supplemental programming existed, some which was even free, and also that APT should further develop our own programming, which in the past has been great.

Commissioner Barnett indicated that, with the clarification that the committee would return with clearly defined options and recommendations, he was comfortable supporting the motion.

**Motion:** By Commissioner Pete Conroy, that the Governor's letter be formally entered into the official record of the Commission. He further moved that the Executive Director be directed to develop an advisory committee to make suggestions to fulfill the priorities in the Governor's plan as suggested in her letter. He also stated that the committee include representation from broadcasters, legislators, individuals with financial legal expertise and members of the public; and that the suggestions be made for the Commission to consider at the next quarterly meeting.

**Seconded:** By Commissioner Logan Glass

**Discussion:** There being no further discussion, the motion was approved unanimously by roll call vote.

**Motion Passed**

Barnett – yes  
Adetunji – yes  
Conroy – yes  
Glass – yes  
Williams – yes  
Stephens – yes  
Green – yes

**Motion:** By Commissioner Pete Conroy that the Commission set aside 30 minutes to hear from people who had arrived to watch the meeting. Commissioner Conroy suggested a two-to-three-minute time limit for each participant.

**Seconded:** By Commissioner Bebe Williams

**Discussion:** There being no further discussion, the motion was approved unanimously by roll call vote.

**Motion Passed**

Barnett – yes  
Adetunji – yes  
Conroy – yes  
Glass – yes  
Williams – yes  
Stephens – yes  
Green – yes

Commissioner Barnett inquired if APT had already notified PBS that APT was exercising the provision in the contract with it, by giving it a 180-day notice to end its membership contract with PBS. Wayne Reid said that had not happened. Commissioner Barnett then made a motion to so give the 180-day notice to PBS so if APT was to receive better offers or have another plan, the 180-day notice would already have started. Barnett stated this would result in giving APT more options as it made decisions. Commissioner Conroy gave his opinion that this was not an option in the Governor's plan as suggested in her letter.

**Motion:** By Commissioner Les Barnett, for APT to give PBS a 180-day notice that APT intended to use its option in its contract to discontinue PBS programming, so as to leave APT's options open during that time period.

Because there was no second to the motion, the motion did not proceed further.

### **Audience/Public Comments**

*Michael Sznajderman*, a Birmingham resident and longtime Alabama Public Television supporter, thanked the Commission for allowing public comment and for the decision to honor the existing PBS contract. He stated that PBS affiliation is central to APT's credibility and public trust and cautioned that even discussion of withdrawal could undermine donor confidence and long-term sustainability. Mr. Sznajderman emphasized the importance of stability, transparency, and continued engagement with viewers and donors, and encouraged the Commission to keep public participation as part of future deliberations.

*Elaine Witt* addressed the Commission and expressed strong support for Alabama Public Television's mission and continued affiliation with PBS. In her initial remarks, she spoke to the educational and cultural value of PBS programming for families and communities and encouraged the Commission to protect access to trusted, high-quality content while pursuing solutions to address funding challenges.

*Ms. Witt* later offered subsequent comments reinforcing her earlier statements, adding that stability and continuity in programming are essential for maintaining public trust and viewer engagement. She emphasized that uncertainty surrounding PBS affiliation could have unintended consequences for families and donors who rely on APT as a consistent and dependable public service.

*Senator Rodger Smitherman* spoke in support of APT and emphasized the role of public television in serving rural and underserved communities across the state. He highlighted the importance of educational programming, workforce readiness content, and lifelong learning opportunities provided by APT. Senator Smitherman

stated that public television is a vital statewide resource and encouraged collaboration between APT leadership, the Commission, and state policymakers to ensure its long-term viability.

*Linda Verrin* addressed the Commission and shared her perspective as a viewer and supporter of public television. She emphasized the consistency and reliability of PBS programming and noted its importance in households that rely on free, over-the-air educational and cultural content. Ms. Verrin urged the Commission to prioritize continuity of service while exploring additional funding avenues.

*Liz Laney* spoke in favor of maintaining PBS affiliation and described the value of APT programming for children, educators, and families. She highlighted the role of public television in early childhood learning and character development and encouraged the Commission to consider the broader educational impact of any future decisions.

*Senator Linda Coleman-Madison* addressed the Commission and expressed strong support for Alabama Public Television as a public good. She emphasized the importance of APT programming to education, civic engagement, and community connection, particularly for families without access to paid streaming services. Senator Coleman-Madison encouraged continued legislative engagement and emphasized the need to protect access to educational resources for Alabama's children.

*Lisa McNair* spoke about the importance of APT as a trusted source of educational and informational programming. She noted that PBS content plays a meaningful role in child development and family learning and urged the Commission to consider the long-term consequences of losing access to nationally recognized programming.

*Anne Turner-Henson* addressed the Commission and spoke to the cultural and educational significance of APT programming. She emphasized the value of arts, history, and documentary content available through PBS and encouraged the Commission to preserve these offerings as part of APT's public service mission.

*Bill Wilders* expressed appreciation for the Commission's transparency and deliberative approach. He emphasized that Alabama Public Television serves as an essential statewide institution and urged the Commission to pursue thoughtful, long-term solutions that preserve both educational programming and public trust.

*Jane Hinds* addressed the Commission and emphasized the importance of PBS programming for families, educators, and lifelong learners. She noted that APT provides consistent, high-quality content that cannot easily be replaced and encouraged the Commission to maintain its commitment to public service broadcasting.

*Diana Isom*, the mother of a child on the autism spectrum, addressed the Commission and shared a detailed and emotional account of the role Alabama Public Television and PBS children's programming has played in her family's life. She explained that her child struggled with sensory overload, communication, and changes in routine, and that PBS programming provided predictable, calm, and developmentally appropriate content that her child could engage with safely and consistently.

*Ms. Isom* described how specific children's programs helped her child learn basic language, social cues, and emotional regulation in ways that were accessible and non-overstimulating. She stated that the availability of free, over-the-air PBS programming was especially important during periods when her family had limited access to other educational or therapeutic resources. She emphasized that the programming served not only as education, but as a meaningful support system for her child's development.

She further noted that PBS programming offered representation and inclusivity that made her child feel seen and understood, which she described as critical to building confidence and a sense of belonging. Ms. Diana urged the Commission to consider the impact that loss of PBS programming would have on children with special needs and on families who rely on consistent, trusted educational content. She concluded by thanking the Commission for listening and for recognizing the human impact behind the financial decisions under consideration.

*David Chaplin* addressed the Commission and expressed strong support for APT and PBS programming. He highlighted the role of public television in providing trusted news, educational resources, and cultural programming and encouraged the Commission to prioritize stability and continuity.

*Michael Jones* spoke in support of maintaining PBS affiliation and emphasized the importance of APT as a trusted, non-commercial source of information and education. He encouraged the Commission to continue seeking community and legislative support to address financial challenges.

*Frank Blanton* addressed the Commission and emphasized the long-standing value of Alabama Public Television to communities across the state. He encouraged the Commission to pursue innovative funding strategies while maintaining the integrity and quality of programming.

*Greg Flanders* spoke in support of APT and PBS, emphasizing the importance of educational programming, especially for children and families in rural Cleburne County. He urged the Commission to continue exploring partnerships and fundraising opportunities to sustain services.

*Sheila Gilbert* addressed the Commission and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to provide public input. She emphasized the importance of PBS programming to education, culture, and community engagement and encouraged the Commission to continue serving as a trusted resource for Alabama residents.

At the conclusion of the 30-minutes timeframe that was set aside for the audience to make comments, Commissioner Pete Conroy thanked all speakers for their thoughtful and heartfelt comments, letters, and attendance.

Chairman Stephens noted that there was no further business to be discussed and called for a motion to adjourn.

APPROVED; NOT SIGNED

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion:** By Commissioner Pete Conroy

**Second:** By Commissioner Logan Glass

The motion passed unanimously.

Barnett – yes

Adetunji – yes

Conroy – yes

Glass – yes

Williams – yes

Stephens – yes

Green – yes

The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 a.m.

*Attached as part of the minutes: Letter from the Governor to the Alabama Educational Television Commissioners.*

Respectfully Submitted,



Lorraine Fancher  
Recording Secretary

**APPROVED – DATE:**

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Mr. Ferris Stephens  
Chairman

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Mrs. Bebe Williams  
Vice Chairwoman